An SDI Program for Distributing Funding Opportunities using Electronic Mail

Paul M. Keenan M.S., Carol H. Montgomery, Ph.D.
Medical College of Pennsylvania and Hahnemann University

ABSTRACT

As the competition for funding increases, the need to make researchers aware of all available funding is becoming more acute. The solution presented here is a Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) service which electronically mails funding information that matches a researcher's keywords. The keywords are part of extensive faculty profiles that make up a Faculty Expertise database. The funding information comes from the Sponsored Programs Information Network (SPIN) database. The software enables researchers to learn about appropriate funding opportunities without spending time actively searching for them.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past ten years there has been a concerted effort by both the federal government and commercial vendors to make funding information available in electronic forms. However, the information accessible to an individual researcher is often dispersed across several different systems, making it difficult to obtain a complete view of the available opportunities. The commercial comprehensive databases developed to date are often difficult for an inexperienced user to search.

In particular, young medical researchers and investigators entering new fields need help in identifying suitable funding sources. The solution presented here is to provide a Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) service to make researchers aware of a broad spectrum of relevant funding opportunities. It is similar to the SDI system at the Yale School of Medicine for *Current Contents*.[1]

COMPONENTS OF THE SYSTEM

The SDI system matches keywords in a comprehensive Faculty Expertise Database with indexing terms from the SPIN database. The Expertise Database is available online and serves many other purposes, including informing faculty about each others' work and capabilities.

The Faculty Expertise Database was initially developed by collecting faculty information for the national BEST*North America database of expertise, as well as certain information of local interest only. In return for participation in BEST, the University received a file of its own faculty's records. These records were then loaded into a MUMPS (M) database designed by the project staff using a combination of M and M/SQL, a fourth generation relational database management system. The system platform is a MicroVAX 3100.

SPIN was selected because it is comprehensive, microcomputer-based, runs on a local area network, and uses a standard xbase format which could be manipulated with several types of PC database software. In our evaluation *SPIN* was found to have excellent coverage of new program announcements, and with a bi-weekly subscription has proven to be almost as timely as an online service. If necessary, library staff can also connect to the publisher's online service to retrieve the most recent program announcements.

In general, the SDI system has been received enthusiastically by researchers. Because it has been active only a few months, it is not yet possible to determine whether the system is having an impact upon the number or type of grant applications submitted by the researchers. This will be measured after a sufficient period of time has passed.

Acknowledgements

This project was supported by NIH Grant LM05373 from the National Library of Medicine. The assistance of Margaret G. Fallis has contributed immeasurably to its success.

References

1. Paton, John A. et al. "Online Bibliographic Information: Integration into an Emerging IAIMS Environment." in *Proceedings of the Sixteenth Annual Symposium on Computer Application in Medical Care.* McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1992, 605-609.